

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6438

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 CAIRO 9072

NODIS/CHEROKEE

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: XGDS-3

TAGS: PFOR IS EG

SUBJECT: ISRAELI CARGO THROUGH SUEZ CANAL

REF STATE 217224

SUMMARY: DISCUSSED REFERENCE MESSAGE WITH FAHMY TODAY. IN CONTRAST TO LAST NIGHT, HE WAS RATIONAL AND REASONABLY CONSTRUCTIVE. CLAIMED HIS NEGATIVE REACTION TO OUR EARLIER DEMARCHE WAS BECAUSE OF THE UNPERSUASIVENESS OF OUR ARGUMENTS. SADAT FULLY INTENDS HONOR HIS COMMITMENT RE ISRAELI CARGO TRANSIT, BUT TIMING IS IMPORTANT. IT COULD HAVE TAKEN PLACE MONTHS AGO OR CAN TAKE PLACE A BIT LATER, BUT THE PRESENT MOMENT WHEN SADAT IS UNDER BITTER RADICAL ARAB AND SOVIET CRITICISM IS NOT THE TIME TO PRESS THE ISSUE. IF ISRAELIS DO NOT ALREADY KNOW THIS, HE HAD NO OBJECTION IF USG CONVEYES IN STRICT CONFIDENCE FAHMY'S VIEW TO APPROPRIATE HIGH LEVEL ISRAELI AUTHORITY. FOR ISRAELIS SUCH TRANSIT IS SOLELY SYMBOLIC AND A SOMEWHAT LATER PASSAGE SHOULD BE EQUALLY SATISFACTORY. IN HIS VIEW, BEST TIME MIGHT BE IN TWO-WEEK PERIOD PRIOR TO SADAT'S VISIT TO US IN LATE OCTOBER. THIS WOULD ALSO ENABLE THE PRESIDENT TO MAXIMIZE IMPACT IN CONNECTION WITH HIS MEETINGS WITH US LEADERS AND PRESS. HE WILL DISCUSS OUR PERTINENT EXCHANGES WITH THE PRESIDENT TONIGHT,

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SEEK HIS VIEWS AND LET US KNOW. GOE APPRECIATES OUR

EFFORTS AND HAS CONFIDENCE IN US PURPOSES. HE AGREED THAT FRANK AND CANDID EXCHANGES ARE NECESSARY TO PERMIT BOTH OF US TO GRAPPLE WITH DIFFICULT COMMON PROBLEM. WHATEVER DUST THERE MAY HAVE BEEN LAST NIGHT, THE AIR WAS CLEAR TODAY. END SUMMARY.

1. IT BEING FRIDAY, I MET WITH FAHMY AT HIS HOME TODAY. HE HAD OBVIOUSLY HAD A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP AND WAS QUITE RELAXED. I TOLD HIM THAT I HAD REPORTED OUR CONVERSATION OF LAST NIGHT AND NOW HAD A REACTION TO HIS COMMENTS.

2. I FIRST AGAIN STRESSED THAT OUR PURPOSE IN DISCUSSING THE ISRAELI CARGO ISSUE WAS TO SHARE WITH HIM IN THE SPIRIT OF FRANKNESS AND CANDOR THAT CHARACTERIZES OUR RELATIONS THE PROBLEM BOTH OF US FACE ON THIS MATTER AND TO SEEK HIS JUDGMENT OF HOW IT MIGHT BE RESOLVED. ON THE BASIS OF THE JUDGMENT HE EXPRESSED LAST NIGHT, WE WILL GO BACK TO THE ISRAELIS AS I TOLD HIM WE ARE WILLING TO DO AND POINT OUT THAT THIS IS NOT THE MOMENT TO PRESS THE ISSUE. WE HOPE SOME DELAY CAN BE NEGOTIATED WITHOUT IT BECOMING A POINT OF PUBLIC CONTROVERSY. HE SHOULD KNOW, HOWEVER, THAT IN OUR BEST JUDGMENT THE PROBLEM WILL NOT GO AWAY AND CANNOT BE POSTPONED FOR TWO MONTHS. GOE'S UNDERTAKING TO PERMIT ISRAELI CARGOES THROUGH THE CANAL HAS BEEN PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE FOR MONTHS. IT PREDATES THE LATEST AGREEMENT AND IS NOW A PART OF THAT AGREEMENT, IMPLEMENTATION OF WHICH WILL BEGIN AFTER CONGRESSIONAL APPROVAL OF THE AMERICAN ROLE IN THE EARLY WARNING SYSTEM AND SIGNING OF THE PROTOCOL IN GENEVA. AS A FRIEND, WE WANTED HIM TO KNOW OUR HONEST JUDGEMENT THAT THE PASSAGE OF AN ISRAELI CARGO THROUGH THE CANAL CANNOT BE DELAYED MUCH BEYOND SIGNING OF THE PROTOCOL WITHOUT IT BECOMING A MAJOR EXPLOSIVE ISSUE. THE ISRAELIS WOULD BE ABLE TO CITE THE RECORD TO THEIR ADVANTAGE. THE DELAY WE ARE TALKING ABOUT IS THEREFORE THREE TO FOUR WEEKS AT THE MOST. I EMPHASIZED WE WANT TO WORK THIS OUT WITH OUR EGYPTIAN FRIENDS AS A COMMON PROBLEM AND THAT WE ARE NOT TRYING TO FORCE ANYTHING UPON THEM. OUR APPROACH OF LAST NIGHT WAS MADE IN GOOD FAITH TO CONVEY THE ISRAELI PROPOSAL. THIS, AS HE WOULD AGREE, IS OUR

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OBLIGATION JUST AS IT IS THE OTHER WAY AROUND. WE WOULD VERY MUCH APPRECIATE FAHMY'S CONSIDERED VIEWS, AFTER HE HAS HAD OPPORTUNITY TO REFLECT ON HOW WE MIGHT BEST PROCEED IN THIS ADMITTEDLY STICKY MATTER.

3. FAHMY WAS CLEARLY MUCH RELIEVED THAT WE HAVE ACCEPTED HIS RATIONALE FOR A DELAY. HE SAID THE TROUBLE WITH OUR APPROACH OF LAST NIGHT WAS THAT ITS

RATIONALE WAS BAD. THE ISRAELIS SHOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO PRESENT US WITH A SHORT LEAD ISSUE LIKE THIS AND EXPECT US TO TRY TO RAM IT THROUGH. AS THE PRESIDENT AND HE HAD REPEATEDLY REITERATED, EGYPT WILL HONOR ITS OBLIGATION TO PERMIT NON-MILITARY ISRAELI CARGOES TO TRANSIT THE CANAL. NEITHER WE NOR THE ISRAELIS SHOULD HAVE ANY DOUBT ON THIS SCORE. AS A MATTER OF FACT, GOE HAD ALREADY MADE ARRANGEMENTS MONTHS AGO--BEFORE THE NEW AGREEMENT--FOR THE TRANSIT OF SUCH CARGO BY DESIGNATED SPECIAL OFFICIALS IN SUEZ CANAL AREA TO LOOK AT THE BILL OF LADING AND OTHER SHIP DOCUMENTS SO THAT MINOR OFFICIALS WOULD NOT CAUSE A PROBLEM. HE FRANKLY REGRETTED THAT THE ISRAELIS HAD NOT SOUGHT TO SEND A CARGO THROUGH EARLIER. THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN NO PROBLEM. THE SOLE POINT AT ISSUE NOW IS THE TIMING. WITH MUCH OF THE ARAB WORLD UP IN ARMS ABOUT THE CONCESSIONS EGYPT MADE IN THE AGREEMENT, AND SADAT FIGHTING A DESPERATE BATTLE TO JUSTIFY WHAT HE HAS DONE, IT WAS SURELY UNNECESSARY FOR ISRAEL TO INSIST UPON THIS PARTICULAR MOMENT FOR SUCH A PASSAGE. FOR ISRAEL THE PASSAGE IS PURELY SYMBOLISM AND IT SHOULD MAKE NO DIFFERENCE IF IT IS DEFERRED A LITTLE WHILE LONGER.

4. HE HAD TO TELL ME IN ALL FRANKNESS THAT OUR ARGUMENT THAT THERE IS NEVER REALLY A GOOD TIME FOR SUCH A TRANSIT WAS SIMPLY NOT TRUE. AS HE PUT IT, "THERE ARE TIMES AND THERE ARE TIMES." THE PRESENT MOMENT IS THE LEAST PROPITIOUS THAT COULD BE CHOSEN AND HE WAS PUZZLED THAT WE SEEMED TO FAIL TO APPRECIATE THIS. AS FOR THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE ISRAELIS MIGHT SEIZE UPON A DELAY TO REFUSE TO IMPLEMENT THE AGREEMENT, HE FOUND THIS ARGUMENT UNPERSUASIVE. THE ISRAELIS HAVE GOTTEN THE AGREEMENT THEY WANT AND ARE GETTING

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\$2.4 BILLION FROM US. MOREOVER, BASED ON HIS DAILY REPORTS FROM GENEVA, THE ISRAELIS ARE MAKING IT PLAIN THAT THEY INTEND TO STRETCH OUT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGREEMENT FOR THE FULL FIVE MONTHS. WE SHOULD HAVE COME TO HIM FRANKLY AND SAID WE BOTH HAVE A PROBLEM AND WHAT DID HE THINK COULD BE DONE WITHOUT RESORTING TO A LOT OF UNPERSUASIVE ARGUMENTS. HE WOULD THEN HAVE GIVEN US HIS VIEWS. I TOLD HIM THAT WE HAVE ALWAYS APPRECIATED HIS HELPFULNESS, BUT THAT WE BELIEVE THE ARGUMENTS AGAINST AN EXTENDED DELAY ARE VERY REAL. IF MY PRESENTATION OF LAST NIGHT HAD COME THROUGH AS ANYTHING OTHER THAN A GENUINE EFFORT TO WORK OUT A PROBLEM TOGETHER, I WAS AT FAULT. HE SAID HE HAD UNDERSTOOD OUR PURPOSE, BUT REPEATED THAT HE CONSIDERED OUR ARGUMENTS WERE HOLLOW.

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6439

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NODIS/CHEROKEE

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

5. I THEN ASKED HIM TO FOCUS ON OUR CONVICTION THAT THE ISSUE CANNOT BE STAVED OFF MUCH BEYOND THREE OR FOUR WEEKS. DID HE THINK IT MIGHT BE FEASIBLE DURING THAT TIME? HE REPLIED THAT HE FRANKLY COULD NOT SAY AT THIS MOMENT. IT WILL ALL DEPEND UPON WHETHER THE ARAB UPROAR HAS ABATED SOMEWHAT. THE TWO-MONTH PERIOD HAD BEEN MENTIONED BECAUSE BY THAT TIME THE ABU RADAYS OILFIELDS WOULD BE RETURNED AND EGYPT COULD SHOW A TANGIBLE BENEFIT. EGYPTIAN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CARGO TRANSIT, HE SUGGESTED, SHOULD TAKE PLACE AFTER THE FIRST ISRAELI MOVE HAD BEEN TAKEN. I SAID I COULD NOT AGREE WITH HIM. THE CARGO TRANSIT ISSUE PREDATES THE NEW AGREEMENT AND IT IS NOT UNREASONABLE TO EXPECT THAT IT NOW BE IMPLEMENTED ASAP. FAHMY AT ONCE BACKED AWAY FROM HIS SEQUENTIAL IMPLEMENTATION POINT.

6. IN A MORE CONSTRUCTIVE MOOD, HE THEN INDICATED HE DID NOT INTEND TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT HE WAS BOUND BY TWO MONTHS - SPEAKING PERSONALLY, HE THOUGHT THE BEST TIME TO RUN SUCH A CARGO THROUGH WOULD BE "8 OR 10 DAYS" BEFORE SADAT'S VISIT TO THE US IN THE LATTER PART OF OCTOBER. THIS WOULD ENABLE SADAT TO GET MAXIMUM IMPACT FROM SUCH PASSAGE WITH US SENATORS, CONGRESSMEN, PRESS AND PUBLIC. IF THE ISRAELIS GENUINELY MEAN WHAT THEIR PUBLIC MEDIA IS NOW WIDELY PUBLICIZING, NAMELY THAT SADAT IS A GOOD ARAB LEADER

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IN CONTRAST TO THE OTHERS, SUCH A DATE OUGHT ALSO TO SATISFY THEM. I POINTED OUT THAT IN TERMS OF KUDOS IN THE US, SADAT WOULD GET CREDIT FOR SUCH A TRANSIT WHENEVER IT TAKES PLACE. FAHMY QUESTIONED THIS. APART FROM ADDING FUEL TO THE ARAB FIRE, HE THOUGHT AN EARLIER PASSAGE -- EVEN IF SADAT COULD BE PREVAILED UPON TO ALLOW IT, WHICH HE DOUBTED -- WOULD QUICKLY BE FORGOTTEN AND BE OF ONLY MARGINAL USE TO SADAT IN HIS US VISIT.

7. I POINTED OUT THAT TEN DAYS PRIOR TO SADAT'S DEPARTURE FOR THE US IS QUITE CLOSE TO OUR OUTER FOUR WEEKS ESTIMATE. IN THE CONTEXT OF HIS RATIONALE, IT SEEMED GOE COULD EQUALLY WELL ACHIEVE HIS PURPOSE OF GETTING CREDIT FOR SADAT ON HIS US TRIP BY ALLOWING SUCH A PASSAGE A WEEK OR SO EARLIER. HE RESPONDED HE WAS NOT WEDDED TO THE 8 TO 10 DAYS, TWO WEEKS OR SO MIGHT BE EQUALLY SATISFACTORY. SO MUCH DEPENDS, HOWEVER, UPON THE SUCCESS OF ALL OUR ABILITY TO PUT THE SYRIANS, PALESTINIANS AND OTHER CRITICS IN THEIR PLACE. AS WE KNEW, GOE IS WORKING HARD ON THIS.

8. FAHMY SUGGESTED THAT, IN STRICT CONFIDENCE, WE PASS TO THE ISRAELIS HIS PERSONAL REASSURANCES THAT THE GOE INTENDS TO HONOR THAT COMMITMENT AND THAT IT WAS READY TO DO SO MONTHS AGO HAD THE ISRAELIS PROCEEDED. THE PRESENT MOMENT, AS THEY MUST REALIZE, IS THE WORST THAT COULD BE CHOSEN IN TERMS OF GOE'S CURRENT CONFRONTATION WITH ARAB AND SOVIET CRITICS. ISRAELIS SHOULD, THEREFORE DEFER, BUT COULD BE SURE SUCH CARGO TRANSIT WILL BE HONORED ASAP.

9. I THEN ASKED FAHMY IF IT MIGHT BE USEFUL FOR HIM OR FOR ME OR FOR THE TWO OF US TO DISCUSS WITH SADAT OUR LATEST VIEWS AS I HAD PRESENTED THEM TO HIM. HE SAID THAT HE HAD NOT REPORTED OUR TALK OF LAST NIGHT TO SADAT, BUT THAT HE WILL THIS EVENING GIVE THE PRESIDENT A FULL ACCOUNT OF OUR PERTINENT EXCHANGES. I PARTICULARLY ASKED THAT HE BE SURE THE PRESIDENT UNDERSTANDS WE ARE NOT TRYING TO FORCE ANYTHING ON HIM, BUT THAT WE HONESTLY BELIEVE THE ISSUE CANNOT BE DELAYED

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BEYOND THREE OR FOUR WEEKS. FAHMY SAID HE WOULD DO SO AND WOULD ALSO DISCUSS WITH SADAT HIS THOUGHTS ABOUT

PERMITTING THE FIRST SUCH CARGO TO PASS THROUGH SOME TIME IN THE PERIOD BEFORE THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT TO THE US SO THAT MAXIMUM IMPACT CAN BE OBTAINED THEREFORM. HE WOULD THEREAFTER AGAIN BE IN TOUCH WITH ME.

10. WHEN WE HAD FINISHED, I SAID I WANTED TO MAKE ONE MORE POINT TO BE SURE THAT THERE ARE NO MISUNDERSTANDINGS BETWEEN OUR TWO SIDES. WE HAVE BEEN SOMEWHAT CONCERNED THAT FAHMY SEEMED AT TIMES TO BE IMPUGNING OUR PURPOSES. I RECOGNIZE THAT BOTH OF OUR GOVERNMENTS ARE UNDER CONSIDERABLE STRAIN AT THE MOMENT IN PRESENTING AND DEFENDING THE AGREEMENT BEFORE DIFFERENT SETS OF CRITICS. I HAD SOUGHT TO PRESENT HIS VIEWS FAITHFULLY, EVEN WHEN THEY WERE STRONGLY EXPRESSED, BUT I ALSO WANTED TO BE SURE THAT HE UNDERSTANDS THAT OUR SOLE PURPOSE IS TO WORK TOGETHER WITH GOE IN TRYING TO RESOLVE COMMON PROBLEMS AND IN OUR MUTUAL INTEREST. WE HAVE NO ULTERIOR MOTIVES AND PRESENT OUR VIEWS IN GOOD FAITH. FAHMY SAID HE FULLY UNDERSTANDS THIS AND THAT HE HOPES HIS SOMETIMES FORCEFUL EXPRESSIONS WILL NOT BE MISINTERPRETED BY OUR SIDE. GOE APPRECIATES OUR EFFORTS AND HAS CONFIDENCE IN US.
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